

Tennessee



&

Tobacco

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Chapter in America's Industrial Growth

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time importance to the
Tennessee. Second only to
9 percent of the total
acres. In 1971 an esti-
mated 105.6
760 acres and sold the
tobacco at 75.7 cents a pound.
retail market for con-
sumers, the majority of
million in retail sales

contributed heavily to
the industry. More than half
of the cigarettes goes into the
average retail price of a
cigarette is 41.6 cents. Ten-
nessee produces most 420 million packs
worth more than \$2.2 bil-
lion. Internal Revenue Service
taxes.

From the colonial period through the "Black Patch Wars" to today, tobacco has played a prime role in shaping the economy of Tennessee. This booklet traces that history and describes the importance of tobacco to Tennesseans today.

Tobacco History Series

First Edition



THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE

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1972

Tobacco production and marketing methods are very similar in Tennessee and Kentucky. Tobacco history in these states, in many instances is parallel. *Kentucky and Tobacco* is also available for readers.

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Tennessee and Tobacco



The hardy Tennessee frontier was long explored and settled by the time the territory was admitted to the Union in 1796. Indians were thought to be the first inhabitants of the Tennessee region—the Chickasaw, Cherokee and Shawnee were among the tribes living there when the first Europeans, the Spanish, explored the area in search of gold around 1540.

There was later a long period of French-British contention over the land area which Tennessee now occupies. By 1763, the British were in control and, eventually, North Carolina annexed the area into its

own administration. After the Revolution, in 1790, Congress organized the area into "The Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio," or, as it was commonly called, Southwest Territory before it was annexed as the state of Tennessee.

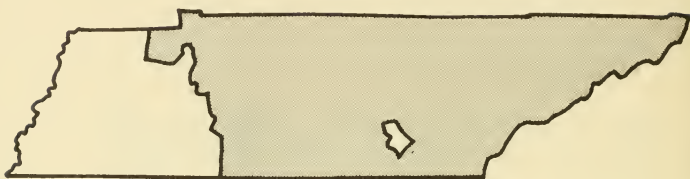
During this colonial period, waves of ambitious migrants crossed the Appalachian Mountains from the East and moved into Tennessee through the Cumberland Gap and the Tennessee Valley. With them, the settlers brought their various trades and agricultural practices.

Throughout its history and growth, tobacco has played an important part in the development of the state. Its seeds arrived with the first settlers. Its cultivation spread rapidly throughout the area and has since become the livelihood for thousands of Tennessee farm families. Tobacco culture has created jobs in manufacturing, processing and myriad other industries related to the tobacco industry. Tobacco sales over retail counters have added millions of dollars in excise taxes to both state and federal treasuries.

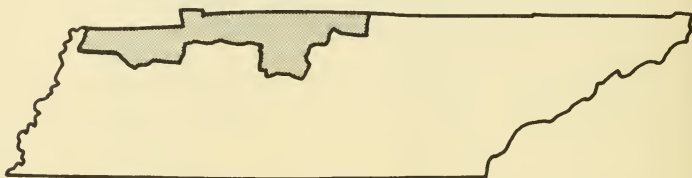
The importance of tobacco to Tennessee is enormous. Its history and development have had a definite economic and political impact upon the state. The following pages offer a contemporary and historical montage of tobacco's importance to the state; outlining how and why the impact of tobacco there has been so important.

TOBACCO AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY
IN TENNESSEE TODAY

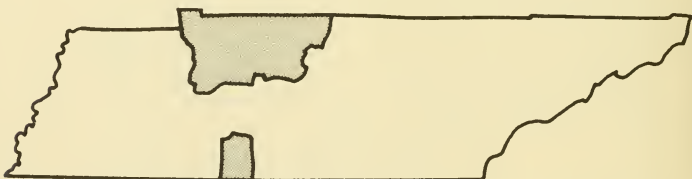
Where Tobacco is grown in Tennessee



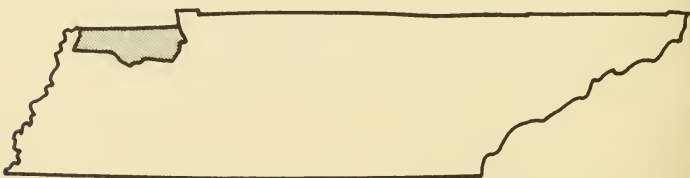
Burley (Type 31)



Dark Air-Cured (Type 35)



Eastern Dark-Fired (Type 22)



Western Dark-Fired (Type 23)

Burley is king

The development of tobacco in Tennessee closely parallels that of Kentucky. Both states share the growth of the four main types of tobacco cultivated in that part of the country. But of these types, Burley, though relatively new to the industry, is the most widely cultivated in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Burley was originally a dark air-cured type known as "Red Burley." Today, it is referred to as "White Burley." The latter type made its first appearance in 1864 near the village of Higginsport in Brown County, Ohio. In the spring of that year, a farmer procured from a neighboring, Bracken County farmer a small portion of tobacco seed known as "Little Burley." He sowed part of the seed and when it was ready for transplanting he noticed some white and yellow colored plants. The farmer took these to be diseased or dwarfed and got rid of them.

The following year, being short of seed, the farmer sowed the same "Little Burley" seed and found a portion of "mutant" plants. In 1866, two hogsheads of this type tobacco were shipped to Cincinnati and sold at a premium price, \$58 for a hundred pounds. Burley, as we know it, gained in popularity and spread throughout Kentucky and down to Tennessee. Its position has never slackened.

Abundant fields

Prior to 1924 Burley production was largely confined to East Tennessee and the total acreage for the state



*Plant beds must be carefully maintained during
initial stages of Burley growth*

Courtesy, the Tobacco Experiment Station, Greeneville, Tenn.

that year was 31,500 acres. Burley farmers in 1924 harvested just over 27 million pounds.

Production of Burley has increased considerably since that time as it is grown today in most of Tennessee's 95 counties. In 1971 Tennessee Burley farmers harvested 82,593,000 pounds on 39,900 acres, averaging 2,070 pounds per acre. The crop was sold through some 20 markets at a total crop value of \$66,240,000, averaging approximately 80.2 cents per pound.

Smokers have found that the taste of cigarettes improves considerably with the addition of Burley tobacco. On an average, 35 percent of the tobacco in cigarettes is Burley. The leaf is also used in domestic pipe and chewing tobaccos; a little goes into some varieties of snuff.

Other types

In addition to Burley, or type 31 as it is classified by the United States Department of Agriculture, there are three other types of tobacco grown on Tennessee farms. The collective area in which they are grown, including sections of south-central and south-western Kentucky, was long known as the Black Patch.

- Eastern Dark Fired, type 22, unlike Burley is fire-cured. It is grown in Montgomery, Robertson and adjoining counties and in neighboring Kentucky counties. The location of the Eastern district is also known as the Hopkinsville-Clarksville Belt. In 1971, Tennessee farmers in the ten counties where type 22 is grown harvested 19,453,000 pounds of this type on 9,800 acres with an average yield of 1,985 pounds per acre. They sold their tobacco for \$11,905,000 at an average 61.2 cents per pound. Type 22 is mainly used in the production of snuff.
- Western Dark Fired, type 23, also a fire-cured Type, is grown west of the Tennessee River in Tennessee and Kentucky. This tobacco is grown and cured like Eastern Dark Fired but it is somewhat different because it is grown on different kinds of soil. In 1971 three Tennessee counties grew and harvested 983,000 pounds of this type on 660 acres averaging 1,490 pounds per acre. They sold the crop for \$571,000 at an average price of 58.1 cents per pound. Like type 22, type 23 is also mainly used for snuff manufacture.
- Dark Air Cured, type 35 or One Sucker, is an air cured tobacco grown mostly in Robertson, Sumner and Macon counties. There is some type 35 production in surrounding counties. The plant is

called One Sucker because removal of the suckers which sprout from the axil is necessary only once during the season. Tennessee farmers harvested 2,576,000 pounds of this type on 1,400 acres in 1971 at an average 1,840 pounds per acre. They sold their crop for \$1,267,000 at an average of 49.2 cents per pound. The principal use of One Sucker has been in the manufacture of chewing tobacco and for the export trade. Selected grades are subjected to special processing methods which are treated as trade secrets under such names as "Black Fat," "Water Baler" and "Dark African." This tobacco is used largely for export and is consumed by pipe smokers.

Long days and hard work

In all, Tennessee tobacco farmers make a hefty contribution to the national tobacco economy. There are an estimated 97,000 farm families involved in raising tobacco in the state. All types of tobacco, representing almost 10 percent of all crops grown in the state, are cultivated on 51,760 Tennessee acres on 96,800 farms. In 1971, the total tobacco poundage produced came to more than 105.6 million pounds averaging about 2,040 pounds per acre. The entire crop was sold for about \$80 million averaging about 75.7 cents per pound. This ranks Tennessee sixth in total crop value for 1971 of the 16 major tobacco producing states.

Tobacco farming is no easy business. During the ten-month growing season, the farmer puts in an average 339 hours of labor per acre to produce a Burley crop in Tennessee.

The art of hand labor is retained in most phases of cultivating, harvesting and curing. Equipment for accelerating the chore of transplanting has largely eliminated that general occupational backache, but the human element is still a controlling factor in the operation.

The start of the season

“Making” a tobacco crop involves more hand labor than any other major agricultural activity. Fertilized soil, well drained and high in organic matter is most desirable.

Initially, tobacco seeds are planted in a treated seed bed during March. The seed bed is normally about 75 to 100 feet long and about nine feet wide. This size bed provides sufficient plants to set a full acre of tobacco. Immediately after seeding, the bed is covered with a cloth to protect the seedlings from cold winds, insects and to keep the soil surface from drying out. After the temperature remains at a minimum of at least 50 degrees, the seeds begin to germinate.

From bed to field

The seedlings are usually transplanted when weather conditions are most favorable, generally between May 10 and June 1. After they have been transplanted and when the plants reach the bloom stage, the flowers are removed. “Suckers,” small shoot-like growths, used to be removed by hand. Today, most farmers can eliminate this tedious chore by applying a special chemical that inhibits the growth of suckers so that full-bodied,



Burley seedlings being transplanted into the field
Courtesy, the Tobacco Experiment Station, Greeneville, Tenn.

highly aromatic Burley can be produced. This will result in uniform ripening of the plant.

Some farmers prime the leaves when they begin to mature; that is, they pull off the first lemon-yellowed leaves before cutting off the entire plant. Generally though, common practice is to cut off the whole plant at the lower part of the stalk. The plants are then speared onto sticks and taken to curing barns where a four to six week "airing out" will literally starve the plant and cause the leaf to turn tan to reddish brown in color.

There has been some experimentation with bulk curing. By this method some thousand pounds of leaves, stripped from stalks, are placed in a specially designed

unit. Heat, conducted by flues, is provided by an oil furnace. Curing by this process can be completed in a week or less.

From barn to buyer

After the tobacco has been thoroughly cured and dried, it is removed from the barn and bulked. This involves stripping the leaves from the stalk and sorting them into the different leaf types according to their position on the plant. Leaves on the stalk, from the bottom of the stem up, are called flyings, lugs, leaf and tips. They are separated and tied into small bundles or "hands" for market.

Bid and take

Cured tobacco is a commodity that must be marketed promptly. It is a delicate article of commerce, liable to spoilage under unfavorable weather conditions. Usually the "hands" are trucked to auction warehouses. A small percent of dark tobacco is not sold at auction, but instead is marketed directly by the farmers at their barn doors. The vast majority of Tennessee tobacco, though, is auctioned off at 20 markets in more than 100 warehouses throughout the state beginning in late fall and continuing through the early part of winter.

Tennessee overseas

A good deal of the tobacco grown in Tennessee is exported to foreign buyers. It is shipped as unmanufac-



Tennessee Burley on the way to maturity.
Courtesy, the Tobacco Experiment Station, Greeneville, Tenn.

tured, leaf tobacco, and as a manufactured product in the form of cigars, cigarettes, smoking and chewing tobacco.

Since Kentucky and Tennessee are the major producers of Burley, most of type 31 shipped overseas comes from fields in those two states. In 1971 West Germany, Sweden, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Japan and Thailand were the major buyers. These countries and a few others purchased 36,535,000 pounds of Burley valued at \$38,540,000 in 1971. In addition, both Kentucky and Tennessee exported 19,622,000 pounds of fire-cured tobaccos valued at \$13,402,000 and more than a half million pounds of One Sucker at \$312,000.

Manufacturing is big business

In 1971, Americans consumed more than 555 billion cigarettes, about 7.8 billion cigars, 70 million pounds of smoking tobacco, over 71.8 million pounds of chewing tobacco and almost 27 million pounds of snuff. The retail value of these products is estimated at more than \$12.5 billion. Although the tobacco grown in Tennessee is not used extensively for manufacture there, it represents a major contribution to the manufacturing plants in Kentucky and other states. Machines in Louisville alone turn out about 107 billion cigarettes yearly and Tennessee Burley is among the various blends used in their manufacture.

There are several major corporations in Tennessee involved in the manufacture of cigars, snuff, smoking and chewing tobacco. Also, there are 16 leaf merchants in the state. These concerns, with offices in Tennessee and throughout "tobaccoland," send buyers to the markets to purchase leaf for their clients, many of whom are overseas and cannot afford to keep a full time office in the U.S. to represent them. Many of these leaf dealers also maintain large facilities to process the purchased leaf. It is cut, dried and prepared for the client and is then "prized" or packed into large, 1,000-pound hogsheads and shipped to the client for manufacture.

The entire process, from farm to package, requires great skill, time, patience, money and labor. The great number of trades and services generated by the social uses of tobacco have long added to the economic importance of the tobacco industry.

The consumer market

Tennesseans are no different in their tobacco-buying pattern from other Americans—the largest consumers of cigarettes in the world. In 1971, through 32,413 retail outlets, they bought 417.9 million packages of cigarettes with an estimated wholesale value of \$91 million and a retail value of almost \$175 million.

Tennessee consumers also purchased cigars, smoking and chewing tobaccos, snuff, pipes and other smokers' articles, and while total retail expenditures for these items are not known, their wholesale value came to about \$106,915,250 in 1971.

The ever-bulging treasuries

Ever since a federal tax was established on manufactured tobacco, the various tobacco products have been heavily taxed. The tax on finished commodities was first applied in 1862. Cigarettes were included in the tax in 1864. Since the inception of the tobacco excise the total yield to the United States Treasury through June 1971 has been over \$61 billion.

The current federal rate on each package of 20 cigarettes is eight cents. It was "temporarily" raised from seven cents in 1952. Tennessee consumers made a substantial contribution to the over \$2.2 billion collected on tobacco products by the Internal Revenue Service in 1971.

The cigarette excise tax in Tennessee is an additional 13 cents per pack. The original tax on cigarettes in Tennessee, four cents, became effective in 1925. It was dropped to three cents in 1937 and increased four times



Ripe Burley tobacco just prior to harvesting

over the years to its present 13-cent rate. In addition to the state excise, Tennessee imposes a $4\frac{1}{2}$ percent sales tax, including state-collected local taxes. This adds an additional two-cents-per-pack cost to the Tennessee cigarette smoker. Also, as of June 1, 1972, the state imposes a six percent tax at the wholesale level on all tobacco products. The total yield to the state from taxes on all tobacco products since the inception of the first tobacco tax in 1925 through June 1972 is \$637,724,917.

The average retail price of a package of cigarettes in Tennessee is 41.6 cents. A full 21 cents, or 50.5 percent of the retail price, is destined to terminate in federal and state treasuries; not including local taxes and the state sales tax. Funds from cigarette and other tobacco revenues benefit all—smokers or not—and their effect is visible through construction and maintenance of schools, hospitals, roads, bridges and in community services, just to name a few.

Much more could be said about the composite tobacco industry based in Tennessee. But the essential facts presented will serve to indicate the significance of tobacco in the state's economy. The history of that achievement is a dramatic one.

THE HISTORY OF TOBACCO
IN TENNESSEE

Colonial beginnings

Indians similar to the Mound Builders are thought to have been the first inhabitants of the Tennessee region. The Chickasaw, Cherokee and Shawnee were among the tribes living there when the first Europeans, led by the Spanish explorer De Soto, arrived in 1540. De Soto was followed by countryman Juan Pardo, but the Spaniards were seeking gold and did not settle.

A long period of British-French contention over the Tennessee region was foreshadowed by the arrival of the French explorers Marquette and Joliet and Englishmen James Deedham and Gabriel Arthur in the same year, 1673. In 1682, Robert Cavalier de La Salle, while exploring the Mississippi River, stopped at the mouth of the Hatchie River and built the first European fortification on Tennessee soil—Fort Proudhomme.

Spurred by reports from scouts such as Daniel Boone, a steady stream of settlers from Virginia and the Carolinas soon began to enter the region. French influence waned and by 1763, following the termination of the Anglo-French wars with the Treaty of Paris, the British were in complete control.

Settlers continued to flow westward despite a Royal proclamation in 1763 that forbade any colonial movement west of the Appalachian Mountains. The fertile lands of East Tennessee, the eastern river valleys of West Virginia and the lands of the Kentucky "Blue Grass" and middle Tennessee attracted many settlers and new establishments continually appeared throughout this region.

First attempt at government

In 1772, the Tennessee settlers formed what they called the Watauga Association to govern the region. Meanwhile, Kentucky was experiencing a greater influx of settlers than was Tennessee. With good fortifications to the North, Kentucky proved an excellent protective barrier for Tennessee from hostile Indians. With conditions being more favorable than ever for continued settlement, Tennessee thrived and, in 1779, Nashville was established as a colony. During its first years of existence though, Indian troubles plagued the small colony—settlers were being slain at the rate of one every ten days. But as the population grew, the Indians were pushed west.

From revolution to statehood

Although the heart of the American Revolution was located on the Eastern seaboard, Tennessee made her contribution to America's independence. The settlers formed a committee of public safety and reorganized their government as the "Washington District." In 1776 they were faced with Indian trouble and appealed to North Carolina for help. Following this assistance, North Carolina annexed the territory and it became Washington County—part of the "Tar Heel" state.

During the Revolution, the first organized settlement in the Cumberland Valley occurred. Settlers cleared their new land and saved the best soils for tobacco. The virgin soils, rich in limestone and nitrogen compounds, proved excellent for tobacco growth.

At the Revolution's end, the Eastern portion of Tennessee almost became another state to be called Franklin. But in 1784, North Carolina ceded her Tennessee county to the United States. Franklin remained in a state of political limbo for a short while; then in 1796, Southwest Territory, as it was then called, became the 16th state to be admitted to the Union. Tennessee was the first state to be created out of national territory.

The "Spanish Intrigue"

Inspection warehouses for tobacco were in full operation by 1780 in Tennessee. Most of the tobacco however, was used purely for domestic purposes. It was extremely difficult to export the Tennessee crop to major ports in the country. It could have been shipped to New Orleans via the Mississippi River, but the Spanish controlled New Orleans and did not allow the tobacco to enter that port. Roading the hogsheads of tobacco over the Appalachians was virtually impossible.

Nevertheless, in 1787, an American general, James Wilkinson, loaded two flatboats in the vicinity of Frankfort, Kentucky, with many consumer items on board including bacon, flour and a good quantity of tobacco valued at two dollars per hundred pounds.

Wilkinson intended his shipment for New Orleans, but he was well aware that his two flatboats would be seized by the authorities when they reached the Natchez area. This happened, but the confiscated cargo was released, and Wilkinson was asked to meet with Don Esteban Miró, then governor of Louisiana. Good relations were established between these two men, and

thus the "Spanish Intrigue," which has since puzzled historians, had its start.

Many believed that Wilkinson, a famous American general who had served with Benedict Arnold in the Quebec campaign, was involved in a plot to separate the western territories from the United States and place them under the protection of Spain. Whether or not this was true, when Wilkinson returned to Frankfort in February of 1788, New Orleans was opened to American trade. The Spanish authorities, already large buyers of Mississippi and Louisiana tobacco, now offered to buy the commodity from both Kentucky and Tennessee.

The Mississippi opens to tobacco

In December, 1788, a royal order issued in Seville permitted Americans to enter goods at Mississippi River ports on payment of the Spanish entry duty. Initially, Wilkinson was shocked at hearing of the Spanish order. He had planned to monopolize trade with the Spanish at New Orleans. He was now competing with the rest of the country. But though the river was open to those who dared risk its passage, Wilkinson had the advantage of precedence, the right political connections and a developing organization.

All shipments were at the owners' risk—and the risks were there. Apart from the physical hazards of river traffic that caused boats to capsize, sink or run aground, there were river pirates and Indians to contend with. For awhile too, outlaws and white renegades infested the long route. They were dangerous, for a call for help, afloat or ashore, when sympathetically answered,



Kentucky and Tennessee militiamen, using long backwoods rifles, played an important part in defeating the British at the Battle of New Orleans, the final conflict of the War of 1812.

too frequently resulted in the seizure of a boat and the massacre of her crew.

Much of the tobacco used during this period was manufactured at home in the form of "twists" for chewing and cigars. Practically all country stores sold "sticks" of twists which were commonly used by the average working man. The elite used only James River tobacco and smoked Spanish cigars.

By the turn of the 19th century, tobacco figured more profitably in proportion to total income to the farmers of the Cumberland valley. One of the first warehouses in the area was built in Pulaski County, Ky., on the Cumberland River and was known as Stigall's Warehouse. Crude as these tobacco warehouses were, they still sold a good deal of tobacco down the Mississippi. Stigall's reported, on the average, annual inspection of 217 hogsheads and nearby Montgomery Warehouse reported inspection of 294. Each hogshead weighed around 1,000 pounds, proving the inspection totals to be far from insignificant.

Overstocked warehouses

Wilkinson's boast that he had opened the Mississippi was justified. Customs records at New Orleans for 1790 showed that more than a quarter of a million pounds of tobacco had been registered in that port alone. An incalculable amount was smuggled in or went to sea without benefit of customs permits.

Western tobacco shipments increased to the point where much more of it was flowing down the river than

could be sold. In 1790 the Spanish authorities were forced to limit the amount of tobacco traded at New Orleans and set the maximum intake at 40,000 pounds annually. In late 1791, Wilkinson, "disgusted by disappointment and misfortunes, the effect of my ignorance of commerce," abandoned his export trade and reentered the United States Army.

American expansion and more troubles with the British

A prevalent form of settlement in the Tennessee frontier was the "station." It was a small group of log cabins arranged so they formed part of an enclosure supplemented by a stockade of posts for defense purposes. The number of cabins usually totaled around two or three dozen, but some "stations," like Nashville, could have well over a hundred inhabitants. Farming and hunting represented the livelihoods of these settlers who often entered a thriving fur trade with the local Indians.

As these "stations" spread throughout Tennessee so did America's desire to increase her land area. In 1802, Spain withdrew the right of deposit in New Orleans to Americans. But Napoleon, who had purchased the entire Louisiana territory from Spain, sold it to the United States in April of 1803 for \$11,250,000. The Tennessee tobacco trade was stepped up again. An American merchant marine took shape and western tobacco began competing in markets all over the world. But international troubles were already brewing.

President Jefferson, in an attempt to deplete French and British supplies of American tobacco, cotton and other commodities, declared an embargo on these products in 1807 and instead of being traded overseas, the tobacco rotted at the wharves, never to be sold. Meanwhile, American seamen were being impressed by the British navy and both Great Britain and France were blockading American ports. American neutrality was violated as tobacco and other commodities were seized at sea. The President, in 1808 and after much controversy, ended the embargo while his countrymen jeered that embargo spelled backwards read: "O grab me."

The troubles with England led to the War of 1812. The Capitol in Washington was burned to the ground, but in the end the British were defeated. The "Long Rifles" of Kentucky and Tennessee played an important part in defeating the British, especially at the Battle of New Orleans in January of 1815.

Tennesseans have had a long history of volunteering to assist and doing more than their share in American conflicts. It is for this reason that the state has long been referred to as the "Volunteer State." Even though this famous encounter took place two weeks after the signing of the peace treaty at Ghent, their victory, under the leadership of Andrew Jackson, saved the entire Mississippi Valley from invasion.

The "Era of Good Feeling"

By 1815, with the seas cleared and open to American shipping, leaf exports snapped back to 90 million

pounds annually from well below 60 million during the British embargo.

In 1816, tobacco production around the Nashville-Clarksville areas was estimated at 10,000 hogsheads. With tobacco as a well established, staple crop, the business of shipping leaf down the Mississippi to New Orleans was becoming more lucrative with each passing day. The postwar era was truly that of good feeling. Commerce and trade flourished as it never had before.

In 1830, the western tobacco fields of Kentucky and Tennessee were turning out one-third of the nation's crop. The Tennessee tobacco industry, for the first time, was making the transition from a supplier of tobacco for export and home use to a supplier of raw material for domestic manufacture. During that same year, one-fifth of the crop was not sent out of the country. It stayed in the United States instead for domestic manufacture, an ever-growing industry. Twenty-one Tennessee counties were each producing more than a million pounds of tobacco and of these, eight produced almost two million pounds. Both Clarksville and Springfield were becoming popular as the largest dark-fired tobacco markets in the world, as more farmers were marketing their leaf on "home ground," and fewer were "prizing" it for shipment to New Orleans.

An expanded market

In 1834, the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad was completed to Knoxville, supplying, for the first time, rail transport to the Atlantic ports and opening middle Tennessee to more trade.

Upon completion of new railroad systems and better river travel, including the steamboat, commerce from Tennessee flowed south down the Mississippi and as far east as New York. Tennessee corn, potatoes, whiskey, bacon, cider, apples, hemp, tobacco, beef, butter, cheese, beeswax, lard, feathers and cornmeal went to the markets of northern Alabama and the lower Mississippi. Although not luxurious, life for many Tennessee farmers was quite comfortable.

The increased production of cotton and wheat in Tennessee inhibited the growth of tobacco for awhile. Shortly before the Civil War, Tennessee wheat commanded a premium price on the New York market. But according to the Census of 1840, Tennessee ranked



Memphis was a busy commercial port as pictured here circa 1851. Millions of pounds of tobacco flowed down the Mississippi River annually.

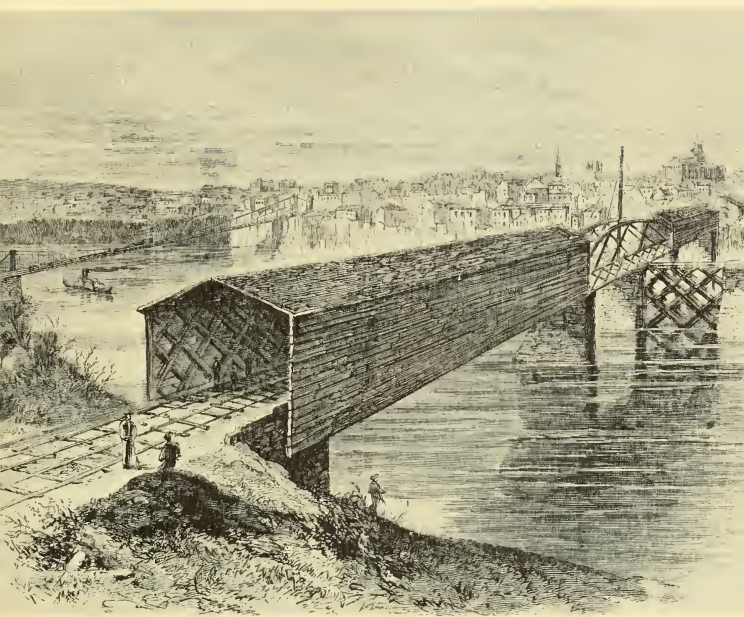
third in tobacco production behind Virginia and Kentucky. In that year she produced 29,550,432 pounds. The total amount produced in the country that year came to more than 200 million pounds.

The Mexican War of 1846 caused a temporary reduction in the production of American tobacco. At the dawn of the Civil War, Tennessee tobacco production was still limited to the northwestern and north central parts of the state. "White Burley" was relatively unheard of until after the War. Tennessee farmers were still producing the dark tobacco which was especially in great demand on foreign markets. In 1859, Virginia still led the country in total tobacco production, but Kentucky followed a close second. Tennessee ranked third again, recording almost 43.5 million pounds.

Farmers go to war

In 1860, nine-tenths of all the tobacco grown in the United States came from slave states. Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee accounted for about four-fifths of the nation's total. The South was also a great tobacco manufacturing area. Just before the War, other than New York the principal manufacturing centers of tobacco were: Richmond, Petersburg, Lynchburg and Danville, Virginia; Clarksville, Tennessee; Henderson, Kentucky; Fayette, and St. Louis, Missouri; and Milton, North Carolina.

When the War began, President Lincoln called on Tennessee to provide troops. A referendum proved Tennessee's sympathies to lie with the Confederate States of America—she seceded from the Union and



The railroad bridge over the Cumberland River, Nashville, 1862

pledged allegiance to the South. East Tennessee, however, provided large numbers of troops to the Union armies.

Next to Virginia, Tennessee was the leading battleground during the War. About 454 battles or skirmishes were fought in Tennessee—she also furnished the largest military contingent from the South—145,000 men, 30,000 of whom fought with the North.

The War proved disastrous to the tobacco industry of the South. For all intents and purposes, it virtually

ceased to function and it was not until the Reconstruction period that tobacco production and manufacture began to rebound.

The dark-fired areas prospered again and, with the development of Burley, tobacco production started to spread throughout the state.

Manufacturing makes the scene

Tobacco factories in the state became almost as numerous as textile factories and grain mills. Licorice and sugar were imported in large amounts for use in special chewing tobaccos. Before the end of the 19th century, a variety of plugs with enticing brand names such as "U Jo's, Five-Cent Pocket Piece," "Peach and Honey," "Old Time," "The Old Tennessee Twist," "Half Bushel," "Select Brazil Smoking" and "All Southerners" represented one of the major, stable sources of income for almost any country store.

Tobacco products did not escape the attention of the revenue collectors, even a hundred years ago. In 1874, while writing a treatise on Tennessee's resources, state Commissioner of Agriculture Killebrew said:

We have dwelt long on tobacco because it is the only great product of the state that is subject to a burdensome tax, and every effort of our people should be made to reduce or lighten the load upon their industry.

In 1875, the Tennessee tobacco crop came to 35 million pounds. Commissioner Killebrew, in a letter to the governor on February 18, 1875, stressed the

importance of continued support and expansion of Tennessee tobacco when he said:

Tobacco, unlike cotton, does not interfere in any considerable degree with the cultivation of the grasses or bread grains, because the quality of tobacco planted is not limited, as cotton, by the number of acres which can be plowed, but by the ability to worm, sucker and house the crop. Consequently the saving in the amount of plowing, as compared with cotton, is so great that a tobacco planter may always make abundant supplies of corn, hay, wheat and other crops . . . The tobacco crop is, therefore, in a degree an extra crop, which, while it supplies the planter with ready money, does not interfere with his raising abundant supplies.

By the 1880's domestic manufacturers, with some consistency, began to purchase more of the crop than did exporters. Manufacturing facilities moved from farm areas to urban areas. Chewing tobacco was extremely popular, and Tennessee tobacco was a major source of American plug.

Beginnings of Burley

It was after the Civil War that Burley production seeped south from Ohio, through Kentucky and down to Tennessee—especially in the eastern portion of the state.

In 1887, two farmers, Clisbie Austin and Silas Bernard, procured some of the new seed and brought it

to the Greeneville area. They convinced many of the local farmers to plant Burley rather than attempting to compete with the flue-cured tobacco growers to the east. Up to 1916, Greene and Washington Counties were about the only ones producing Burley. After that its growth spread throughout most of the state. But before discussing Burley's important impact upon the state, it is necessary to delve into the formation of a controversial group, hated by many, revered by many, that changed the entire face of the industry in the state. The "Night Riders" of Kentucky and Tennessee left a trail that is not likely to be forgotten.

Black patch blues

Dark tobacco in Tennessee has been grown, over the years, in an area commonly referred to as the Black Patch. It is located in the north central and northwestern part of Tennessee and in the south central and southwestern part of Kentucky. The four basic tobacco districts in the Black Patch include: The Northern Dark-Fired or Stemming District, the Eastern Dark-Fired District, the Western Dark-Fired District and the Bowling Green Dark Air-Cured or One Sucker District.

Pioneer tobacco farmers in the Black Patch, generally, migrated from Virginia and North Carolina. Initially, they grew tobacco for home consumption, but with the development of commercial river traffic and trade with Natchez and New Orleans, the Black Patch farmers became principal exporters of dark tobacco in the country.

In 1900, Tennessee grew about 53.5 million pounds of dark tobacco. One historian described tobacco cul-

tivation there and in Kentucky as “the life of the Black Patch. The breath of agriculture and business, the money crop of the entire area.”

The latter part of the 19th century and the early 1900’s saw a downward trend in the prices of dark tobaccos. This was due, in part, to overproduction, a federal leaf tax, some poor leaf quality and a shift by consumers to tobacco products not utilizing dark types. But as time went on, a more important factor was involved.



From an 1883 lithograph of Lookout Mountain, Chattanooga

"Hill Billies" and "Night Riders"

As in other industries, manufacturing was becoming more centralized, and in the case of tobacco fewer buyers were purchasing increasingly larger shares of available leaf. As the number of competitive buyers diminished, so did prices offered to growers. By 1901-02, typical Black Patch tobacco was selling for two cents per pound—less than it cost to grow. A group of Eastern District tobacco men sought relief from Congress in 1904, without success.

As a consequence, some 5,000 farmers met that fall in Guthrie, Kentucky, forming The Dark Tobacco District Planter's Protective Association of Kentucky and Tennessee. They agreed that the organization would serve as their sales agent. Growers who chose not to join became known as "hill billies," connoting a resemblance to a goat.

At first, major buyers tried dealing with the "hill billies" but soon had to turn to Association sources for leaf supplies. In 1905, Felix Ewing, secretary-treasurer of the Association, was able to tell more than 18,000 members and sympathizers in a rousing speech that:

Now, we are ahead. The tobacco world expects us to win, and that we must do so upon an honest, conservative basis should be the one thought in the mind of every honest tobacco planter.

To some Association members, however, price recovery was disappointingly slow, and late in 1905 a "Committee of 32" began taking action, sometimes violent, against growers who dealt outside the Association. A "Night Riders" organization began a series of forays during the next several years, burning barns

and destroying crops, occasionally inflicting beatings in an effort to discourage independent growers over a 12,000-square mile area of the Black Patch.

Relief came by 1909, when the U.S. Supreme Court broke up the so-called tobacco buying "trust," and Congress repealed the leaf tax. By 1915, its usefulness gone, the Association was dissolved.

Burley boom

Meanwhile, the expanding Burley crops brought improving prices, reaching 40 cents a pound by 1916. In 1921, the East Tennessee Tobacco Association and the state department of agriculture launched a campaign which led to Burley planting in more than 20 counties. They produced a total crop of more than 18 million pounds. A market was opened in Knoxville around 1923 and Burley planting spread throughout the middle part of the state. The tobacco economy was hurt, but only temporarily, by the post-World War I deflation—with overproduction came bad prices.

Throughout the 1900's, tobacco production in Tennessee has steadily increased. Although the total acreage harvested has been a good deal more in the past than now, technology and science have afforded the tobacco farmer an opportunity to produce a lot more tobacco per acre than in the past.

In 1920, for example, the average yield of tobacco per acre in Tennessee was 760 pounds. In the latest year of record, 1971, Tennessee tobacco farmers produced an average of 2,040 pounds per acre.

Tobacco production has come a long way in Tennessee since the pioneer days. Tobacco farming is big

business and with the cooperation of state tobacco associations and both the state and federal governments, the science of tobacco farming and marketing has evolved more and more into a united effort to produce a more refined crop much more efficiently.

Tennessee's fine tobaccos make a strong contribution to the U.S. tobacco industry. From tobacco for cigarette manufacture to tobacco for snuff, chewing and smoking, to that exported, helping our balance of trade, the industry in Tennessee has long been, and for a long time to come will be, a strong part of the commerce, agriculture and industry that make up the "Volunteer State."

Data on the current tobacco industry in Tennessee have been supplied by the Economic Research Service and Agriculture Marketing Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. Other data on the current industry are derived from publications of the Tennessee Crop Reporting Service and the Agriculture Extension Service of the University of Tennessee.

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The Killebrew quotations on page 29 and 30 are from *Tobacco: Its Culture in Tennessee*; the Felix Ewing quote on page 33 is from *The Tobacco Night Riders of Kentucky and Tennessee*.

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